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ABSTRACT

This study described the experiences of five interns and their cooperating teachers during internships in high school language arts classrooms that included diverse students and used team teaching. The study investigated participants' perceptions and experiences in this type of classroom versus previous experiences in inclusive classrooms without special educators present. Data from interviews, field notes, journals, and document analysis indicated that interns were positive about their team teachers but felt they were at a disadvantage by not having previous experience in similar teaching situations. They were pleased that teachers collaborated to ensure success for all students and that there was time allotted to planning for instruction, implementation, and assessment of special education students. They found that teachers could integrate the content and skills necessary for successful achievement levels. They felt that students' self-efficacy was empowered by having two teachers' attention in class: Interns and teachers held constant high expectations for all students. All but one of the interns believed that both teachers and students benefited from the team approach, with special educators supporting all students. All voiced a need for additional coursework in student diversity and in classroom management for regular and special education students. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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TEAM TEACHING: INTEGRATION OF INCLUSION AND REGULAR STUDENTS

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TEAM TEACHING: INTEGRATION OF INCLUSION AND REGULAR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

As the 21st century begins, teachers and teacher educators are searching for ways to better address and serve the populations of diverse and inclusive students in our classrooms. Standards for learning, legislative mandates, and recent calls for reform in education have recommended that teachers reevaluate how they teach, how students learn, what should be taught, to whom it should be taught, and when it should be taught.

This paper describes the use of team teaching to teach all students in the general education classroom and the most promising approaches to implementing team teaching. There have been numerous reports and research about the need and immediacy for incorporating inclusive students to regular classrooms, but there has been little research to guide teachers and interns on meeting those students' needs in the classroom. More colleges of education and school systems are incorporating the team teaching approach to effectively include students with special needs to the general population.

This was a phenomenological study conducted to explore the ways in which teachers and teacher educators could most effectively plan and implement their teaching to best serve the populations in today's classrooms. The researcher conducted qualitative methodologies including: a) interviews, b) field notes, c) journals, and d) document analysis. The study explored the questions of how the interns in the study perceived, experienced, and addressed the needs of inclusive students in their classrooms with regard to the issues of: a) team teaching, b) student success, c) professionalism of the team, and d) needs for additional professional development.

Introduction

Historically, most teachers have taught in isolation from other teachers. As children were identified as having special needs and legislation was mandated to include those students to the regular classroom, teaching has changed dramatically. In the 1970s, special needs students were taught in classrooms with their own teachers apart and separate from the general student population. Over the past 25 years, these students have made their way into the regular classroom, or were mainstreamed into the regular student population in schools. Most students were mainstreamed for selected subjects or parts of the school day; they were not considered part of the class. Many of these attempts were abandoned because their adoption was a top-down decision not supported with adequate preparation for teachers or interns working with those students (Goddu, 1975; Sterns, 1977; Goodlad, 1984).

In recent years, this practice has moved toward inclusion of all special needs students into the regular classroom. This created the need for team teaching, or the sharing of classroom responsibilities of regular classroom teachers and special education teachers (Lambert, 1995; Shields, 1997). The research and reform in education focused on the quality of teachers entering the classroom and profession of teaching, the quality of professional development for teachers, and the quality of the environment in which teachers work and students learn.

Review of the Literature

The concept of inclusion was controversial. Some advocates called for "full inclusion," or placing all students with disabilities in general education classes. Others

took a more moderate approach by supporting the creation of inclusive schools that welcomed students with disabilities while holding that for some students, general education placement might not be the best educational option. Controversy surrounding inclusive practices often centered on the placement of students in the general education classes without appropriate supports. Research findings indicated that the success of students with disabilities in general education classes was related to the supports and services they received (Shields, 1997). Clearly, implementation without proper support would not help students achieve. Many professional associations adopted policies and position statements that emphasized the importance of supplementary aids and services for children with disabilities in general education classrooms, including team teaching approaches to methodologies.

As Lombardi (1995) noted, "Although the literature abounds with mission statements, philosophies, theories, principles, opinions, perceptions, and guidelines, few studies exist on the efficacy of inclusion for the broad range of students with severe disabilities and who are eligible for special education." Additionally, research indicated that when students with disabilities were placed in general education classrooms, they showed better social development, more social interaction, enhanced skill acquisition and generalization, better health, more independence, greater success in meeting the objectives of their IEPs, and more normalized adult functioning. Their presence in the classroom gave their classmates and others more positive attitudes about children with disabilities (Simon & Karasoff, 1992).

Given the individuality of inclusive school programs and the abundance of strategies and techniques they used to support inclusion, what do these schools and

teachers there have in common? Meyer (1997) identified the following characteristics in his research:

1. A sense of community: An inclusive school has a philosophy and a vision that all children belong and can learn in the mainstream of school and community life. Diversity is valued and celebrated. Everyone belongs and is accepted and supported.
2. Leadership: An inclusive school's principal is supportive and assists in planning and carrying out the strategies that make the school and all students successful.
3. High standards: An inclusive school gives all children the opportunity to achieve high educational outcomes. Levels of achievement, instructional content, and the manner in which instruction is delivered reflect each student's needs.
4. Collaboration and cooperation: An inclusive school encourages students and staff to support one another through collaborative arrangements such as peer tutoring, buddy systems, cooperative learning, team teaching, co-teaching, and teacher-student assistance teams. (p.316).

Teachers and students in the general education classroom had to be prepared to receive students with disabilities. For teachers, preparation involved becoming aware of students' specific disabilities as well as their strengths, weaknesses, and special educational needs. In a collaborative model the general education and special education teachers each brought their skills, training, and perspectives to the team. Resources were combined to strengthen teaching and learning opportunities, methods, and effectiveness.

Typically, the primary responsibility of a general education teacher was to use his/her skills to instruct students in curricula dictated by the school system. Typically, the primary responsibility of special education teachers was to provide instruction by adapting and developing materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each of his/her students (Bauwens, & Hourcade, 1995).

In special education situations, the individual learners' needs often dictated the curricula. General educators brought content specialization, special education teachers brought assessment and adaptation specializations. Both brought training and experience in teaching techniques and learning processes. Their collaborative goals were that all stud3ents in their class were provided with appropriate classroom and homework assignments so that each was learning, was challenged and was participating in the learning process (Angle, 1996).

Team teaching was described in the late 1980s as "an educational approach in which general and special educators work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings . . ." Team teachers were simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibilities for specified education instruction that was to occur within that setting (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989, p. 36).

The distinctive feature of team teaching, which differed from earlier approaches, was that it was direct collaboration with the general education and special education teachers working together in the same classroom most of the day. An effective team of teachers worked together as equal partners in interactive relationships, with both involved in all aspects of planning, teaching, and assessment (Crosby, 1993).

Collaboration involved commitment by the teachers who worked together, by their school administrators, by the school system, and by the community. It involved time, support, resources, and, monitoring. The biggest issue was time for planning, time for development, and time for evaluating. Planning was also a factor in selecting the students who were a part of the collaborative process. It was important to keep the natural proportions of typical students, students identified as being at risk, and students who had been found to have disabilities (Lambert, 1995).

Methodology

This study used the qualitative paradigm to describe the experiences of 5 interns and their cooperating teachers during the spring semester internship in English language arts classrooms. Specifically, the researcher was interested in describing their perceptions and experiences in an inclusive classroom that employed team teaching as compared to their previous experiences of inclusive classrooms without a special education teacher present. As reported by Lincoln and Guba (1985), there were three key points that guided this approach to understand the human experiences and to construct reality and truth from those experiences: (a) researcher and participants construct their own meaning, (b) the epistemological foundation is based on values and judgements, and (c) because of grounded theory and triangulation, the research is empirical. Data was collected from January through May from various sources: (a) formal and informal interviews, (b) field notes, (c) document analysis, and (d) participant observations. The data was triangulated as a check for reliability and validity.

Participants

The participants were senior interns who were completing their internship before graduating with a Master's in Education. They were 5th year students with alternative certification and had returned for the necessary coursework in education, and all had excellent GPAs. They were assigned to McGregor High School and placed with English teachers teaching grades 9, 10, 11, and two interns were placed with teachers at grade 12. The cooperating teachers were Master teachers and all had at least 5 years of teaching experience in that system. The researcher was the supervisor of clinical experiences for those interns and taught all in a graduate curriculum course that semester.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe the ways in which these five interns experienced and addressed the needs of inclusive students in their classrooms with regard to the issues of: (a) team teaching with the special education teacher present, (b) student levels of success and achievement, (c) professional collaboration of the classroom teacher and special education teacher, and (d) needs for additional professional development and training for working with special education students.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

1. How did the interns adjust to teaching in teams with the cooperating teacher and the special education teacher? As a general rule, even experienced teachers varied widely in how they organized and presented classroom materials. Each of the interns had been exposed to situational experiences with no special education teacher present in the classroom as they had progressed in the teacher education program. This was the first experience for them to teach in a team teaching triad,

and they were unfamiliar with their role as a student/teacher/team member. The interns differed in respects of their sense of the classroom teachers' expectations of the team teaching approach, and often had questions about the purposeful (a) expectations, achievement objectives, and writing assignments for students, (b) how they communicated with students about the assignments, (c) the curriculum and assessment of the students' work. This finding supported the research of Telfer, Jennings, McNinch, and Motley (1990) who identified four areas of concern for educators who work with at risk and special education students: (a) curriculum modification, (b) assessment modification, (c) program development, and (d) demonstration of concern. As documented by Woloszyk (1996) modifications were critical for effective teaching of special education students who were inclusive. All of the interns believed that the team teaching approach was more effective and beneficial than the traditional inclusion method of one teacher for regular and inclusive students. One area of concern for them was that when the special education teacher was absent from the room, the inclusion students did not respond favorably to the regular classroom teacher or to them. The 9th grade intern reported that the English teacher became a "risk taker" when she altered English curriculum for the special education students in that class. That teacher along with the special education teacher developed a reading program for those students allowing them to succeed in English and later related how their success spilled over to other classes.

2. How did the interns perceive the students' levels of success to be altered or increased by the team teaching method? With only their experiences that

semester, they felt limited to compare the previous levels of success of those students; however, all reported that the students' self-efficacy appeared to be empowered by the two teachers' attention and assistance in class. They quickly became involved in the planning of the IEPs and attended meetings to become part of the team approach. Three of the five interns volunteered to tutor after school at the suggestion of the special education teacher who encouraged them to become more familiar with the disabilities and learning problems exhibited by those students. They were involved with modification of lessons and assignments for the special education students, and quickly developed an alternate assessment for the students as well. Additionally, they held constant high expectations for all students in class with verbal and non-verbal expressions of those beliefs. They used several teaching strategies that were effective with all students: (a) visual mapping, (b) written notes, (c) questioning, (d) skimming, (e) chunking, and advance organizers. Pluralism and diversity were served when students were allowed to weave the differences of thinking in cooperative groups and developed a respect for those differences.

3. What were the strengths and/or weaknesses of the team teaching approach with regard to the professional collaboration of the classroom teacher and special education teacher? All but one of the interns felt that the team approach was beneficial to the teachers and students. There were weekly meetings that included the team members planning for one hour the next steps in the program and curriculum for all members of the class. During those meetings, the interns were made a part of that planning and given rationales for the changes and suggestions

for the IEPs. All reported that the team approach gave increased ownership to the classroom teacher and that the special education teacher was supportive not only for the special education students but the regular students as well. Often, these teachers were friends outside the school and some attended professional meetings together. One pair (10th grade) were involved in graduate classes and action research projects together using their classroom students for participants. These were very positive role models for professionalism for these interns to observe during their professional semester.

4. What additional coursework or training did the interns feel would be beneficial to them as they began their teaching career? All voiced a need for additional coursework in classroom management for regular and special education students. Most had problems with time on task and keeping the students interested and motivated during a lesson. Additionally, they felt that the one class in special education that they had been required to take during their academic career did not afford them adequate knowledge for teaching and dealing with the diversity of needs and abilities in the classroom. The students in the classroom presented a myriad of problems for the teachers and interns; however, the interns reported that they felt they "had to look beyond the usual - - - to read, research, and discuss to set new goals and processes." The internship had given the interns opportunities to dialogue with seasoned professionals who had a vested interest in their success as teachers. Each teaching team gave extra time to the interns for conferencing and feedback on their progress as they were immersed into the real classroom setting.

Conclusions and Implications

1. The perceptions of the interns regarding their perceptions of their teaching with the team approach suggested a need to determine how to design earlier experiences for team teaching in the teacher education program. While there were very positive responses from the interns and praise for their team teachers, all felt that they were at a disadvantage by not having previous experience in a similar teaching situation. They were pleased to find that the teachers worked collaboratively to ensure the success for all students in the school, and that there was allotted time to the planning for instruction, implementation, and assessment of those special education students. While there was agreement that English classrooms were more difficult with regard to assessment of how and why teachers teach the skills that they do, they found that those teachers were able to integrate the content and skills necessary for successful achievement levels.
2. Because the interns felt somewhat unprepared to deal with the diversity of the students' needs, there needed to be additional coursework built in to teacher education programs that addressed team teaching strategies as well as special education needs. While the reform in education demands a higher competency on test scores, there had to be a focus on overall quality of the instruction and student learning and not just the end-of-the-year scores.

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